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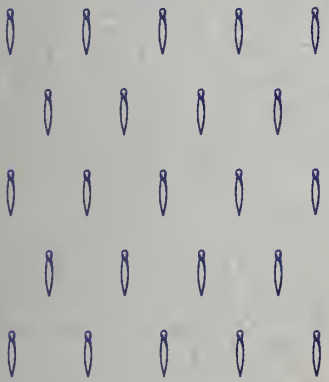
THE CHINESE YOUNG WOMAN YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY



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The Chinese Young Woman Yesterday and To-day

R. HÜ KING ENG, who is herself a high type of the Chinese young woman of to-day, in describing the graduation of one of her girl students, naively remarked: "Many parents, when they saw what a young woman could become, regretted that their daughters were married — or drowned."

This little sentence gives in a nutshell the difference between Yesterday and To-day in the possibilities that life holds out to the Chinese girl. It is true that she has always been more fortunate than her little sister in India, for she has not been throttled by the iron hand of caste, nor has she been suffocated in harem or zenana. Faithful widowhood, long-continued, has been honored, and the mother of sons, as her years increase, has great power. Woman has even been deified, and in the pantheon of China's gods the Queen of Heaven has held the popular heart.

But these favorable aspects of her lot have been more than offset by a list of very real

grievances. Here is a girl naturally well dowered. "Chinese women have pretty faces," is the verdict of a Korean gentleman, and the graceful, carefully arranged dress and the exquisite politeness of the Chinese girl might well be copied by her American sisters. Patience, industry and modest womanliness have been her distinguishing characteristics. What a pity that there should be dark shadows in the picture and that her lot should nevertheless be bitterly hard!

A Chinese proverb says: "Eighteen beautiful daughters are not equal to a boy with a limp." Again and again the birth of a little girl has brought sorrow and anger to a household. Such a useless expense! Leave the little pest at somebody's gate, or better, drown her! The significance of Dr. Hü's remark now becomes plain. Yesterday no one dreamed that a girl could count for anything in China.

Another of the Chinese girl's long-standing grievances has been the practice of foot-binding. Here, as at many other points, the three religions of her country have combined against her. She was utterly bad in her former lives, declares Buddhism. She must always have a low place until she is the mother of sons, says Confucianism. And Buddhism and Taoism unite to promise her for the future the tortures and terrors of purgatory. Bind her little feet and keep her out of mischief—and begin early, before she can make much fuss about it. If she cries with the pain, beat

her. Then the family will not be disturbed. Oh, the suffering of China's daughters from this one cruel custom! Who can measure it?

The Chinese girl's brother was early sent to school and there was always the hope that, some day, if he studied hard, and passed the dreaded examinations, he might proudly bring home the red button of the Mandarin. Not so his sister. She was a stupid little pig and could not learn. A medical student, modestly receiving her diploma and going out to help other girls and women, was a dream that never came to the Chinese father and mother. For centuries the girl of China has waited just for the privilege of going to school. To-day the closed road of Yesterday is opening wide.

Walk along the streets of China's Yesterday. What is this procession that is coming? A gorgeous red chair preceded by a band of music, and in the chair a timid, shrinking figure clad in bright scarlet cloth thickly embroidered in gold and colors, with a veil to match. Oh, this is a child-bride going to the home of a husband she has never seen. He may be old, he may be an idiot, he may even be a leper! And waiting there is the terrible mother-in-law whose slave she will have to be. There is no help for it. It is custom, and this is the final word in the China of Yesterday. Here is no girlhood, no

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet."

If she takes good care of the pigs, and becomes the mother of sons, and hobbles around quickly on her little crippled feet, her mother-in-law may be good to her. Her husband will beat her if he wishes. It is his right. Poor little Chinese bride! No wonder she oftens drowns herself in the well.

But happily, while this is still the To-day for millions of Chinese girls, it is the Yesterday for those who have had the sweet, uplifting and enlightening influences of Christianity thrown around them, and as China falls into line with the world's march of progress the number of young women for whom the darkness is being left behind is constantly increasing.

There is no more hopeful sign of the new day than the springing up of girls' schools in all parts of China. The mission schools have been the pioneers in this great movement, some of them having been in operation for a score of years and longer. Unbinding the feet was often a condition of admission long before the present agitation of this needed reform. For years it acted as a barrier against the ingathering of large numbers, but now there is no difficulty in finding a mother-in-law for a girl with natural feet. In fact, not long ago a mother came to a missionary asking help in marrying off her daughters. She was in difficulty because they had "unfashionable small feet." This is the China of To-day!

Dr. Hü was the first girl in Foochow to unbind her feet, while Dr. Mary Stone is the

first girl in all Central China brought up by her own parents with natural feet, although her mother did not unbind her own feet until several years later. Perhaps she was like the old woman who was heard to declare that she couldn't think of being seen "hobbling up the golden streets on bound feet." A committee of influential Chinese men is now in charge of the Anti-Foot-Binding Society, and in the large cities, at least, "the passing of the golden lilies" bids fair to become an accomplished fact.

Chinese college men appreciate what education is doing for girls, and wish for wives who can be their companions. Recently three young men students brought their wives to a girls' school, begging their admission that their feet might be unbound and their minds trained. Cheerfully these young wives took their places in the children's classes, fitting themselves to be their husbands' helpmates.

Another girl student of fourteen is a wife who was chosen and forced upon an educated boy by his family. Angry at being obliged to marry an uneducated girl with bound feet, he was so unkind to her that at last both families agreed that she must be sent to school. There, with her feet unbound and a new life opening before her, the danger of the dreaded divorce is over, and happiness seems assured.

Sometimes the pendulum of progress swings almost too far. Two day-pupils in another school have adopted things western

in a wholesale style. When they applied for admission they were in full European dress. They had no Chinese education and did not care for it; they wanted English and music. They could read some English, which they could not understand; neither could the teachers, *as they read it.* They could play "Jesus Loves me" and "Peter Piper." The missionaries gave them the best advice possible, some of which was that they wear their native dress. In a few days they returned, asking that they might come to school in their foreign clothes as they had no others. The request was refused, but in about ten days they appeared again, transformed by their becoming Chinese dress.

Another pupil has gained the nickname "Puss in Boots," because she has her little old-style feet encased in new-style velveteen boots. She is not only fashionably dressed but is also saturated with cigarette smoke—a too progressive type!

It is said that now there is not a prince's palace or an official's home where the girls are not studying: that now a woman is ashamed if she cannot read, whereas formerly it was held to be a matter of little importance.

The government schools require the pupils to refrain from wearing ornaments or artificial flowers, and from using paint or powder. The hair is simply braided or coiled in a Japanese knot. They wear a sort of uniform, usually a plain black or dark blue garment.

Another sign of the times is a daily newspaper, *The Peking Woman's Journal*, edited by a woman—something not found even in the land of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. And still another is a Chinese mother-in-law who, when her sons married, sent them away to homes of their own, saying, "My daughters-in-law married my sons, not me." No slavery to a cruel mother-in-law for these girls!

The skillful Chinese woman doctors, the housekeepers whose shining windows and immaculate kitchens bear testimony to their skill, the teachers with bright faces and trained intellects, and the charming kindergartner, "a quaint China aster of a maiden about whom the gaily dressed little folks flutter like so many butterflies," all show the dawn of happy days for China's girlhood.

Already in some parts of China the government schools, with their lack of Christian training, are proving unsatisfactory, and girls are being sent in preference to the mission schools, where they learn that an educated mind alone is inadequate to the need; that a renewed heart and a loving spirit are the only leaven that can transform their country.

The "new woman" has come, worthy to be the teacher of the little child, the inspiration of the artist and poet, the counseller and comforter in the domestic world, and in the larger world that needs her loving ministrations.